Lomonosov Moscow State University

**English national character vs.**

**Russian national character:**

**stereotypes**

“The world of Britain”

Final project

Done by Nadezhda Yu.Cherepova

Checked by A.L.Nazarenko

Moscow, 2017

**Table of contents**

[Introduction 3](#_Toc481529084)

[How national character can be studied 3](#_Toc481529085)

[Description of the English character 4](#_Toc481529086)

[Description of the Russian character 6](#_Toc481529087)

[Stereotypes 7](#_Toc481529088)

[What the English think of themselves 8](#_Toc481529089)

[What the Russians think of the English 9](#_Toc481529090)

[What the English think the Russians think of them 10](#_Toc481529091)

[What the Russians think of themselves 11](#_Toc481529092)

[What the English think of the Russians 12](#_Toc481529093)

[Conclusion 13](#_Toc481529094)

[List of references 15](#_Toc481529095)

### 

### Introduction

The concepts of the national character and stereotypes seem to be very important when it comes to getting general impression of a nation and the problem of mutual understanding. The issue is becoming even more important in the age of globalization when contradictions are distinctive between the national and universal.

A number of philosophical and cultural studies have been carried out to describe characters of different nations. Hippocrates,David Hume, Immanuel Kant, Claude Helvétius devoted their philosophical essays to the notion. They were first to discourse on the foundations of national traits, finding them both in physical features of the country (climate, landscape, location) and in social, political, economic and psychological factors.

The main aim of this project is to find out some ideas underlying the concept of national character and to describe national characters of the English and Russians from this point of view. Another aim is to consider stereotypes which both nations have about themselves and about each other.

### How national character can be studied

National-character studies are considered to be a relatively new approach in social science. They differ widely both in their underlying theoretical assumptions and in their research objectives.

Margaret Mead, a proponent of national character studies, distinguished three approaches [1]:

1. The analysis of relationships between the basic learning common to children within a nation and later characteristics seen in the behavior of adults within the same society. Formative childhood experiences are the focus of these studies.
2. Societal studies of the pattern and structure of interpersonal relationships. They are focused on studying cultural sanctions operating throughout the society to reinforce behavioral patterns, which determine consistency in cultural configurations. As a result, cultural constraints become fixed and internalized aspects of personality.
3. Studies comprising simple comparative descriptions of cultural configurations which distinguish one nation from another; different life styles and ways of looking at things are defined as part of national character. Such studies are considered to be surface descriptions of what seem to be consistent culturally defined values, or behavior patterns, regardless possible underlying motivations or personality mechanisms.

In contrast, studies included in the first two categories mentioned by Mead seek to push beyond the descriptive level to find out certain underlying structurally consistent aspects of personality that are manifested in the behavior peculiar to members of a given society.

International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences [1] defines the term “national character” as the enduring personality characteristics and unique life styles found among the populations of particular national states. This behavior is sometimes considered on an abstract level, that is, as cultural behavior without actual reference to necessarily different personality modalities. It may also be considered as motivated by underlying psychological mechanisms characteristic of a given people.

### Description of the English character

One of the first psychologically based books on national character called “Englishmen, Frenchmen, Spaniards” was written by Salvador de Madariaga, a Spanish historian, writer and diplomat [2]. There he analyses basic approaches to life that determine natural and spontaneous reactions of these nations. The English, from his point of view, are said to be governed by the idea of “fair play” [3]. Taken from the sport terminology, fair play means perfect adaptability of the player to the game on the whole. It can refer to the relations of the player both with his own and opposing teams. Keeping good relationship with the opponent, seeing the world as a game and players as both opponents and collaborators develop such quality as wisdom. Moreover, fair play implies ranging values and needs where the game as a whole takes the top place, and team values are put over personal ones. So the essence of the fair play concept is the feeling of the balance between individual and mutual, which determines the perfect system of interactions between people. So the main intention behind the fair play is the action itself and will to perform it [3].

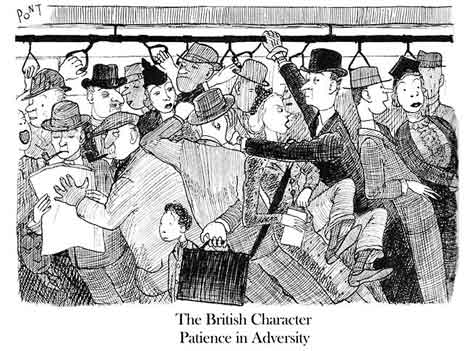
This key idea of fair play and action as a philosophical notion behind it explain many other characteristics of the English:

Fig.1 Patience in adversity

* taking control of their actions and self-control, self-consciousness
* their dislike of theories which are not related to practical things
* some lack of logic in their actions (which is a reflection of their attention to constantly changing situation)
* utilitarianism, which implies achieving results of actions, practical good either for a person who gives or to the person who receives; this is revealed in such a character trait of the English as charity
* materialism and focus on mass and force (let’s consider Newton’s theory as an example). They say “that doesn’t *matter*” which is very materialistic approach to the meaning of words
* ability to collaborate and use collaboration for the benefit of all; collaboration in opposition is the other side of the idea (in parliamentary system and sport: “two British is a football team” – one of the sayings that can serve as an example)
* ability to organize an action respectively to the situation
* honesty and responsibility that regulate social relations; social service
* the feeling of hierarchy which is both situational and traditional (tradition here can be understood as an archive of previous deeds and events open to present activity)
* aristocracy as traditional social stratum and a personal trait (Madariaga says that every person in England is an aristocrat for somebody else)

Every Englishman is convinced of one thing, that to be an Englishman is to belong to the most exclusive club there is.

(*Ogden Nash, American humorist*) [5]

* combination of aristocracy and intention to follow group restrictions explains another well-known trait of the English – insularity

Not only England, but every Englishman is an island.

(*Novalis, German poet and novelist*) [5]

* the English can be shy when they are uncertain and hesitate to take an action in a particular situation
* snobbery can be described as a inclination to judge about people and things according to the criteria borrowed from upper strata (so again the idea of following group regulations)
* hypocrisy is a tendency of the English to think of other nations who can’t understand the value of collectivism and moral regulations of a group as being on lower levels of development; at the same time hypocrisy allows to an individual to feel free being put in the situation of strict regulations.

The English are great lovers of themselves and of everything belonging to them. They think that there are no other men than themselves, and no other world but England. (*Italian visitor*) [5]

Best of all, the idea of how the national character of the English can be described is summarized by Charles Dickens:

There is in the Englishman a combination of qualities, modesty, independence, a responsibility, a repose which one would seek in vain among the Nations of the Earth.

(*Charles Dickens*) [5]

### Description of the Russian character

Unfortunately, Madariaga didn’t analyze the Russian national character in a similar way. Nevertheless, in other studies we can find insights on the foundations of the Russian national character. In one of them [7] the basic quality is considered to be the dual nature of the Russian character. It is determined by such factors as geographical position between Europe and Asia which leads to sharing values of both collectivism and individualism; climatic conditions which make Russian people work hard during short periods of time and demonstrate laziness and negligence for quite a long time.

“The living conditions let the Russian people know that they should cherish the workdays when the weather is fine in the summer days because the summer days get shorter due to the unusual and unexpected bad weather. Russian people have to race with the time in order to complete the work in a shorter time. However, they will have to stay at home with nothing to do in the autumn and winter. Thus the Russian people have formed a habit that it seems they are eruptible. They do things fast and deftly. Nature has cultivated the Russian people to work very industriously in the shortest time. But they cannot be accustomed to persevering and laboring orderly. It is true that they have energy of outburst but they are still lack of endurance.” *V*. *Kliuchevsky, a famous Russian historian* [7]

Another source [17] points out that the Russian national character has been developed over the centuries under the influence of a complex of such factors as the severe climate of Northern Eurasia with cold winters and a pronounced change of seasons, the vast expanses of Russia, the multi-ethnic nature of the state, the need to defend the long external borders. A significant role in the formation of the national character played Orthodoxy – the most common religion and the basis of the worldview over the centuries.

The Russian people faced the endlessly difficult task – the task of design and organization of their immense land. The immensity of the Russian land, the absence of borders and limits were expressed in the structure of the Russian spirit. The landscape of the Russian soul corresponds to the landscape of the Russian land: the same infinity, formlessness, aspiration to infinity.

*(N.Berdyaev, Russian philosopher)* [17]

The main features of the Russian character include the greatheartedness, perseverance, compassion, humility, the pursuit of justice, community, the ability to feat, the ability not to give up.

Russians are stubborn people, and if they once had a good idea, they will sooner or later implement it with a truly Russian scope! (*K.Simonov, Russian poet)*

Russians do not have such features as arrogance and hypocrisy (on the contrary, painful self-criticism is very common). Russian**s**, as a rule, often experience emotional ups and downs (this is facilitated by the change of seasons). They are good at finding a common language with representatives of other nations due to being open-hearted, hospitable and empathical.

In general, the Russians are not so different from other peoples. However, like in many other multinational states, the nature of the Russians themselves as a nationality cannot be understood as unification by blood, but by the prevailing culture of the country, of which many other nationalities have long been a part.

### Stereotypes

Stereotypes constitute a person’s set of expectations about a social group’s characteristics, including traits, behaviors, and roles. Being cognitive in form, stereotypes are interlocked with affect and behavior [8].

The more descriptive definition characterizes national stereotype as a system of culture-specific beliefs connected with the nationality of a person. This system includes beliefs concerning qualities of human beings that may vary across nations, such as appearance, language, food, habits, psychological traits, attitudes, values etc.

Stereotyping serves cognitive, motivational, and social purposes. For example, stereotyping saves mental effort, smoothes interactions if both people agree on the stereotype.

Scientists distinguish two main kinds of stereotypes: auto-stereotypes and hetero-stereotypes. The former refer to beliefs that people of one nation have about themselves whereas the latter include stereotypes of a nation about another one. Auto- stereotypes are usually more positive as they are of great importance for making a feeling of unity and high self-esteem for a nation. Hetero- stereotypes can be true or false and often include neutral or even negative properties which can be transformed in prejudices and superstitions and cause opposing or even conflict relations between nations. So studying stereotypes we can develop better mutual understanding and better relationships.

O wad some Power the [giftie](http://www.robertburns.org/works/glossary/773.html) [gie](http://www.robertburns.org/works/glossary/769.html) us   
To see oursels as ithers see us!

“To A Louse”. Robert Burns [9]

### What the English think of themselves

 Traditional type of an Englishman is exemplified by John Bull [20]. He is usually depicted as a stout, middle-aged, country dwelling, jolly, matter-of-fact man. He is describes as hard-drinking, hard-headed, averse to intellectualism, fond of dogs, horses, ale, and country sports.

Fig2. John Bull

As a literary figure, John Bull is well-intentioned, frustrated, full of common sense, and entirely of native country stock. Unlike Uncle Sam later, he is not a figure of authority but rather a yeoman who prefers his small beer and domestic peace, possessed of neither patriarchal power nor heroic defiance.

Another image of an Englishman is described by J.Paxman in his book “The English: A Portrait of a People” [10] where he quotes the author Simon Raven as saying that Englishness meant "gentle manners, cricket, civility between the classes, lack of malice towards others, fair dealing with women, and fair dealing with enemies."

More comments on the British say [12] that their best characteristics are culture, courtesy and consideration for the needs of others. Indeed, they are very polite. They always queue and hold the door open for the person behind them. Also, the British bobbies have a reputation of being the friendliest and helpful policeman in the world. On the other hand, English football fans are regarded as hooligans and vandals able to tear stadiums into pieces.

Fig 3. You can tell I'm British because...

What the English are like at the beginning of the twenty-first century is described by Paxman as follows [10], "Respectable Society has evaporated"; the English have become less gentrified. Materialism and selfishness are rampant. There is a seemingly unstoppable wave of drunkenness, loutishness, and other undesirable manifestations of apparent social deterioration. In fact, however, there is nothing new about all this. For centuries past, foreigners have been commenting on the English fondness for hard drinking and fighting. Modern football hooligans are heir to a long tradition of rowdiness; football crowds were already fearsome in 1903, and in the village of Malmesbury, where there was a fight in 1641 resulting in several serious injuries, a local saying ran: " 'Tis no revel unless there be some fightings". In earlier times, too, the English were famed for their emotional nature. It is the nineteenth-century stiff-collar stiff-lip Englishman who was the aberration.

Paxman identifies the most characteristic qualities of the breed as "a quizzical detachment, tolerance, common sense, bloody-mindedness, willingness to compromise, [a] deeply political sense of themselves [and above all a] sense of 'I know my rights' ".



Fig 4. Brits abroad

### What the Russians think of the English

General stereotypes [11] are that Brits have class and manners; they are gentle, dress well, drink a lot of tea. Quite a lot of young people are familiar with Doctor Who, Sherlock and a general amount of goodness UK pour on Russian people in the form of writers, actors and musicians. Comments on the net also mention British humour, weather and aristocracy. The longer lists [13] include Beer, Bull dog, Cricket, Tea, Big Ben, Shakespeare, pubs, Mr. Bean, Double Decker bus, Queen, Morris Dancing, Royal family, Union Jack, God Save the Queen, Battle of Britain, Trooping the Colour’ , Rain…  
Here are mentioned some stereotypes that are considered true and false by the English themselves [13]:

True:

English people drink tea all day (in 2009 they were ranked 6th in the world drinking 1.89 kg of tea per person per year)

Fig 6. Queuing

[](http://www.nationalstereotype.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/5-stereotypes-about-Britain-that-are-simply-not-true-and-5-that-really-are-9.jpg)[](https://www.google.ru/url?sa=i&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=images&cd=&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=0ahUKEwjWgOLo-tHTAhXhPZoKHYtABJIQjRwIBw&url=http://punch.photoshelter.com/image/I0000eEiMdlbxKUw&psig=AFQjCNFw2b5CDo18TREpkqtc4sATMpESiw&ust=1493840236540363)English love to queue

Fig. 7 Attitude to class system

Fig. 5 Importance of tea

English do everything by the book (Britain is one of the most rule-bound nations of the world)

Britons are obsessed with the class system

English love to celebrate royal occasions.

False:

Everyone in England is closely related to the Royal family

It rains every day in Britain

Pubs in Britain serve only warm beer

Everyone in England has plummy accent and talks like the Queen

All Britons have bad teeth

### 

### What the English think the Russians think of them

The way how representatives of one nation reflect on what other nations think of them is always very interesting and can result in better mutual understanding. The reporter of the Independent in Moscow Shaun Walker wrote in 2010 [16]: Russians have a complex relationship with Britain, or as they insist on calling our country, "Foggy Albion". London, they assure me, is frequently so foggy that life comes to a standstill, and no amount of persuasion that, unless you live in a tent on Exmoor, Britain is no foggier than the average Moscow autumn day, will suffice.

Along with the fog comes the standard roll-call of stereotypes – endless tea drinking, stiff-upper-lippery, and emotional retardation. (While most Russians actually knock back far more tea than any Brit I've ever met, anyone who has seen the inscription on a Russian birthday card, or heard a Russian give a toast at a drinking session, would agree that compared to them, we do tend to keep our emotions under wraps.)

Alongside the inevitable national stereotypes comes a huge amount of genuine knowledge. Much of Soviet schooling, when it touched on the English-speaking world, revolved around British culture and literature. There's hardly a Russian alive who isn't a fan of "Sherlok Kholms", and they also love to get stuck into weightier classics. I was once chatting up a girl at a bar, and it was all going swimmingly until she started pontificating about The Forsyte Saga. "Well, it's about four million pages long and pretty dull; I never got very far with it," I admitted. She looked at me as if I was an illiterate peasant.

In the methodical rote-learning that Russian schooling provides, there also seems to be a great deal of focus on London and its sights. A 12-year-old who'd never been abroad once revealed to me the top 10 artifacts he wanted to see at the British Museum, in ascending order.

### What the Russians think of themselves

There are certain traits that are mentioned by many authors and resources on the net [17].

* [](https://www.google.ru/url?sa=i&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=images&cd=&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=0ahUKEwjVv8GH6dHTAhUhEpoKHcUQD40QjRwIBw&url=http://vseruss.ru/novosti/rossiya-1/Traditsii-russkogo-gostepriimstva-38633&psig=AFQjCNG9PCJq1tvsll3CuSqskHapy886qw&ust=1493835484041818)Readiness for heroism, ability to mobilize forces at a certain moment. Most of the time, Russians save or economize on energy, try not to strain, show low interest in what is happening. At that time they are prone to mild depression, searching for and thinking about the sense of life. However, there are times when the Russians are moving into the "mode of achievement". The cause for active action can be war, revolution, the development of new territories, etc. In such periods the Russians show their best features: mass heroism, self-sacrifice, industriousness, leadership qualities. The occasion for a small "feat" can be a festive date: a birthday, New Year or wedding. In such periods, the Russians cease to be content with the small, getting into debt, showing unprecedented generosity and extravagance.

Fig 8. Hospitality of the Russians

* Generosity, greatheartedness and hospitality. Probably, the reasons for these characteristics were natural conditions: the huge area and the abundance of fresh water. Russians are one of the few nations who use the stream of water for washing. For example, many

Englishmen and Japanese collect water and wash the whole family, not because of poverty or scarcity, but because of the tradition of saving. Though Russians are distinguished by kindness, hospitality, compassion, straightforwardness, they do not manifest arrogance. Thanks to this, they can easily find a common language with other peoples. The reason for this is that the Russian state has been multi-ethnic from the very foundation to the present day. As a consequence, the Russians have been able to master vast areas from the Urals to Alaska.

* Humility and Spirituality. The most important feature of Russians is the need for faith. This need is realized as deep confidence in oneself, in one’s work, in one’s own country, in people, and as spirituality and religiosity. Russian religiosity has a pronounced spiritual character, in contrast to the Protestant ethic, aimed at achieving material prosperity.

The Russian is distinguished by faith, faithfulness and reason.

*(A.Suvorov, the Russian chieftain)* [17]

* [](https://www.google.ru/url?sa=i&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=images&cd=&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=0ahUKEwjW17vZ_dHTAhXLHpoKHfcKBggQjRwIBw&url=https://ru.wikipedia.org/wiki/%D0%A1%D1%8B%D1%87%D0%BA%D0%BE%D0%B2,_%D0%A4%D0%B5%D0%B4%D0%BE%D1%82_%D0%92%D0%B0%D1%81%D0%B8%D0%BB%D1%8C%D0%B5%D0%B2%D0%B8%D1%87&psig=AFQjCNGsUrfo8pI2noYCmk1Ky7WFNnKt-g&ust=1493840963296332) Perseverance. For centuries, living in a zone of risky farming, under the constant threat of raids, both from the Great Steppe and Scandinavia, Russians, unlike Europeans, could not hope that the constructed or sown by them would certainly not be wasted, so Western European perfectionism is not Russian. If something is brought to an operational state, the Russians often stop improving it, they take less care about its durability and, to an even lesser extent, about its exterior design.
* Spirit of Mutual Assistance. Risky life has led to the fact that the Russians in every possible way suppressed the competition, because it was wasting resources on the competition itself.

Fig 9. F.V.Sychkov Difficult River Crossing

* A sense of justice. Unlike Western culture, where everything that is legal is justified, the Russians consider true everything what is justly deserved.

### What the English think of the Russians

Russian people are perceived by the British as clever, but lazy, talented, but careless [19]. By Western standards, people in Russia could have achieved much more if they had exerted more efforts and were more responsible.

On the other hand, it is this sloppiness that allows solving problems unresolved for another mentality. A purely Russian feature is perceived to be the ability to solve problems, considering them from an unusual point of view.

As an ability to laugh at their own problems is not alien to the English themselves, they also distinguish this quality in the Russians. Also, our peoples share a critical view of our own countries, poking fun at people’s habits and character traits, however, if a foreigner does this, it is both hostile to the British and to the Russians.

[](https://www.google.ru/url?sa=i&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=images&cd=&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=0ahUKEwjT6O_6-NHTAhXmHJoKHZ0rAYgQjRwIBw&url=http://www.imperiyanews.ru/details/67bf8b8a-02c7-4947-8633-1d6647194176&psig=AFQjCNFAR0hjIn8X5aYva1dPaNjbIMZ6Ow&ust=1493838025482684)Thanks to the Orthodox religion, widespread in our country, Russians are perceived sacrificial, strong, persistent, understanding and forgiving. Many residents of England note that in terms of moral values, Russia has gone far ahead.

Fig 10. Russian wit

The Russians in England are considered witty (although the humor of the English is far from Russians’ one) and generous (although this generosity and the so-called willingness to give away the last shirt is bordered more by imprudence and naivety).

Many nations, including the English, think of the Russians as barbarians. Some things that cause indignation in many nations, make the Russians stay detached for some reason. In the eyes of the English, Russians are insensitive to any manifestations of violence, rudeness, discomfort, or lack of choice.

The English believe that Russian people are ignorant, rude, inclined to violence. Besides, the manifestation of barbarism in them is considered to be the drunkenness of the Russian nation. As far as one can believe in the stereotype that has developed in England, a Russian uses alcohol in huge quantities to eliminate problems and all the ills surrounding him.

### Conclusion

National stereotypes can influence state or personal relations of people both in a good and in a bad way. However, there exist personal traits that are characteristics of all people regardless their nationality. To my mind, they are perfectly described by the English poet Rudyard Kipling in his poem “If”.

If

If you can keep your head when all about you

    Are losing theirs and blaming it on you,

If you can trust yourself when all men doubt you,

   But make allowance for their doubting too;

If you can wait and not be tired by waiting,

    Or being lied about, don’t deal in lies,

Or being hated, don’t give way to hating,

And yet don’t look too good, nor talk too wise:

If you can dream—and not make dreams your master;

    If you can think—and not make thoughts your aim;

If you can meet with Triumph and Disaster

And treat those two impostors just the same;

If you can bear to hear the truth you’ve spoken

    Twisted by knaves to make a trap for fools,

Or watch the things you gave your life to, broken,

    And stoop and build ’em up with worn-out tools:

If you can make one heap of all your winnings

    And risk it on one turn of pitch-and-toss,

And lose, and start again at your beginnings

    And never breathe a word about your loss;

If you can force your heart and nerve and sinew

   To serve your turn long after they are gone,

And so hold on when there is nothing in you

Except the Will which says to them: ‘Hold on!’

If you can talk with crowds and keep your virtue,

 Or walk with Kings—nor lose the common touch,

If neither foes nor loving friends can hurt you,

If all men count with you, but none too much;

If you can fill the unforgiving minute

    With sixty seconds’ worth of distance run,

Yours is the Earth and everything that’s in it,

    And—which is more—you’ll be a Man, my son!

By Rudyard Kipling

### List of references

1. <http://www.encyclopedia.com/social-sciences-and-law/sociology-and-social-reform/sociology-general-terms-and-concepts/national>
2. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Salvador_de_Madariaga>
3. <http://anthropology.ru/ru/text/madariaga-s/anglichane-francuzy-ispancy>
4. <http://vivovoco.astronet.ru/VV/PAPERS/MEN/MADRE.HTM>
5. <http://festival.1september.ru/articles/585123/>
6. <http://national-mentalities.ru/en/diversity/russkij_nacionalnyj_harakter_i_mentalitet/pavlovskaya_a_v_how_to_deal_with_the_russians_main_features_of_the_russian_character/>
7. <http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1057992.pdf>
8. <http://www.encyclopedia.com/science-and-technology/technology/technology-terms-and-concepts/stereotype>
9. <http://www.scottishpoetrylibrary.org.uk/poetry/poems/louse-seeing-one-ladys-bonnet-church>
10. <http://www.acampbell.org.uk/bookreviews/r/paxman.html>
11. <https://www.reddit.com/r/russia/comments/1cxemy/what_do_russians_think_of_britain/>
12. <http://sciaga.pl/tekst/71182-72-the_british_character>
13. <http://www.nationalstereotype.com/english-stereotypes/>
14. <http://www.nationalstereotype.com/55-nations-stereotypes-that-will-ruin-or-make-your-day/>
15. <https://ru.scribd.com/document/106252768/British-Cultural-Identities-2nd-Edition>
16. <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/this-britain/little-britain-how-the-rest-of-the-world-sees-us-2043190.html>
17. <http://ruxpert.ru>
18. <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems-and-poets/poems/detail/46473>
19. <http://englishgid.ru/jiznvanglii/obraz-jizni/anglichaneorusskix.html>
20. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Bull>